



SMA ROUNDTABLE

BEES IN MUNICIPAL TREES AND PARKS

This Roundtable asks city foresters and beekeepers about ways to save honeybees in city trees and parks. City foresters also share their approach to dealing with wasps, yellow jackets, and aggressive Africanized bees.

There has been, in the last ten or so years, a large increase in the number of people practicing backyard beekeeping. They and more veteran beekeepers may be able to help with a hive removal. You can contact your Cooperative Extension office for a list of local beekeepers or see online directories like www.beeeculture.com/directory/find-local-beekeeper and www.bee-removalsource.com/bee-removal-list.

People may not be aware that once bees are away from the hive, most honeybees are not at all aggressive, and some aren't even aggressive when you're close to the hive. If the hive is out of the way (like the one in a tree in one of our downtown parks that is about 15 to 20 feet/5 to 6 m up, in a decayed cavity), most people will never know it's there. This particular park is the site of a weekly, very active farmers market, and we've never had a complaint about the bees. I suspect most people don't know they are there.

If we do have to do a tree removal, the only method I've seen used here that has a chance of saving the hive involves pruning away the wood above the top point in the hive, then tying off the section of trunk with the hive, cutting below it, and lowering it onto a waiting truck to be sped away to some safe place. The trunk is then set on the ground and the bees are left to fend for themselves. The move is disruptive, but it may allow the colony to survive. The local arborist who has done this procedure borrows a bee suit for the final cutting stage, but up to that moment the bees really don't seem to be stirred up by the noise and commotion.

If there is a colony that simply has to be eradicated, most beekeepers recommend a 1:1 water:dish soap mix. Put this in a sprayer of some sort, and dose the bees. It not only suffocates them (as with an insecticidal soap), but the thickness of the mixture gums up their wings, etc. The advantage of this approach is there is very little chance of unintended damage to non-target organisms, and it's very effective—I've heard of people using it to take out hives of Africanized bees.



Albuquerque City Forester Joran Viers is also a beekeeper. Photo by Jessica Viers

Certainly permethrin or carbaryl will do the job as well, but being actual chemical toxins, they have a bigger chance of unintended damage.

Wasps are a bit different, in that they have few folks out there talking up their ecological value. They are actually pretty good predators of landscape pest insects, so that's a plus. Out here we often get the ground-nesting Western yellow jacket, and the combination of their naturally hostile disposition and their ability to sting multiple times without dying (unlike honeybees) make them much more problematic. We would take control actions if either our grounds crew or the public had complaints about them. If it's possible to find the nest entrance, then a dusting of the entrance area with permethrin or carbaryl in a powder form might be effective.

Bee hives can be tricky to spot, as they almost always

nest in a cavity of some sort. Only once have I seen bee combs hanging free from a branch, a hive placement that gives them no protection from the elements and from winter. Look for bees congregating in an area, look for little gaps into which they are flying/crawling. If it's hard to find, and it's out of the way, I would suggest leaving them alone. Most people won't even know they're there, and they provide many landscape benefits to us.

—Joran Viers, City Forester, City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Department, Albuquerque, New Mexico

In the spring of 2014 I received a call that the City of Tulsa had encountered a honeybee hive in a tree they were removing on City property near the Arkansas River. The City cut the section of tree with the bee hive and placed it on the curb and notified our local bee club to come retrieve it. I drove over, secured the openings in the log, took it to my apiary, and oriented it upright. There was a hole in the top of the log that I attached a new hive box to and created a passage into the box from the log. Over the course of a few months, the bees begin moving up into the box, building new comb and laying new eggs. I was eventually able to remove the log completely, as the bees had mostly moved up into the new box attached to the top. The hive is still alive and well today in its new home.

—James Deming, Beekeeper and Proprietor of Shadow Mountain Honey Company (shadowmountainhoney.com), Tulsa, OK



Passageway from tree log to new hive box • Photo by James Deming



Exposed bee comb on beauty leaf (*Calophyllum*) tree • Photo by Jeff Shimonski

We have had to occasionally remove trees that contain honeybee hives. First, we contacted local beekeepers to discuss the situation and advise if the insects are worth keeping. Often they are interested in extracting the bees into a portable hive, which may take some time. Scaffolding to support the portable hive near the opening or a way to hang it from the tree is necessary to allow the honeybees to find their new, portable home.

If there is an emergency, this approach won't work. However, it may be possible to temporarily seal the opening to reduce bees flying out during the work. When cutting around a hive, it can be a challenge to know the extent of the cavity and the size of the hive. Caution and protective equipment/suits are a good idea. Having a sprayer ready with material in case the hive gets out of hand may also protect innocent bystanders and crew members. The work should be timed when the bees aren't as active.

Wasps and yellow jackets are usually not worth trying to move. As with bees, planning the treatments during the times the insects are not active helps reduce actual conflicts with the target pest.

—Gordon Mann, Registered Consulting Arborist and Owner of Mann Made Resources, Auburn, CA

This tree became a safe haven for four honeybee colonies that had been attacked by a black bear foraging for food. Their hives were totally destroyed, so all the bees fled and collected on the nearest tall tree to form this monster swarm. This is a highly unusual situation, because there is always only one queen bee in a colony, with very few exceptions to this rule. Assuming four queens are present in this monster colony, these queens will eventually meet up with each other and have a royal battle, with only one queen surviving to take over.

This required beekeeper intervention because the bees were homeless and without food. We divided the colony into four equal sizes, each approximately the size of two basketballs. We introduced them into new hives, each with twenty frames of honey. The introduction was done through the use of a queen excluder, thus enabling us to check if a queen was present.

Fortunately, the queens were marked with a green dot (green was the international queen colour for 2014) on the thorax, which helped to spot the queen readily as well as knowing her age. Three queens were identified; the fourth most likely perished during the bear attack or had already been set upon by a fellow queen bee. So we introduced a new queen into the fourth colony of bees, thus making them all queen right.

Under normal circumstances a colony leaving a hive will almost always gorge themselves on honey to help them start a new colony. This engorgement leads to a docile swarm of bees, hence any swarm of bees hanging on a branch of a tree will be docile and easy to handle. The swarm of bees will almost always seek a secluded, dark cavity to build their new nest. The cluster on the tree branch is merely a temporary stopover and, weather permitting, their scout bees will have located a good nesting place and the whole colony will move off the same day, leaving behind a very small number of straggler bees.

When it comes to removing bee colonies from unwanted positions, knowledge and experience are valuable assets. The willow tree is a favourite nesting site for bees because of the cavities present in the older trees. Our golden rule is to always remove the colony alive and not harm the bees during the process, irrespective of the position and length of time the colony has occupied the position.

Careful observation for tell-tale signs will indicate how long the bees have been resident, as well as how much comb building has taken place, together with how many entrances the bees are using. A wire cone is placed over the main entrance and all other entrances are sealed permanently. A trapping hive with one frame of brood and three frames of drawn comb are placed as close to the wire cone exit as possible. The worker bees



Monster bee swarm • Photo by Vic Macdonald

exit the tree to go foraging and on their return cannot get back into the tree trunk. They will cluster around the wired entrance and eventually move into the trapping hive and care for the brood frame. Depending on the age and size of the colony, it should take a maximum of five days to extract the bees.

Quite often, between the hours of 11am and 2pm the bees will fly around vigorously and often the queen is attracted to the outside by all this activity. When the bees are using the trapping hive actively, with little to no activity at the wire cone, wait for the evening when the bees are no longer flying and seal the trapping hive and take it a minimum of 2 miles (3.2 km) away from the trees' position, thus avoiding the bees returning to the tree. The wire cone is then removed and the entrance is permanently sealed.

The question always asked is, what happens to the honey comb? The willow tree is difficult to break open to get to the honey comb, so it is left in the tree trunk and it will eventually be destroyed by wax moths.

When bees have just moved in to a position for a day or two, they can either be smoked out or vacuumed out and placed in a trapping box. So if spotted early, the removal task is very easily achieved.

—Vic Macdonald, Owner of Bees Incorporated (beesincorporated.com), Kelowna, British Columbia



Beekeepers in Menlo Park perform regular hive inspections to ensure a healthy bee colony. Photo by Brian Henry

Menlo Park, California is an affluent city located on the peninsula between the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. The Menlo Park Department of Public Works is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 22,000 trees. The community's canopy is composed of about 20% native oak species and is highly diverse in age.

Bees and other pollinators are an integral component of the health of Menlo Park's urban forest. The Menlo Park City Arborist receives several calls each year to deal with bee-related issues. In 2013, the Department of Public Works made an operational shift to protect honey bees. To do this, staff completed a beekeeping class and formed relationships with local members of the San Mateo Beekeepers' Guild.

In the spring of 2013, the City received ten phone calls regarding bee swarms. Swarming is when a new honeybee colony is formed when the queen bee leaves the colony, taking about half of the bees with her. As the swarm relocates, they often rest on street trees, parked

cars, or street signs. Staff responded to each location with the proper beekeeping equipment to safely capture and relocate the swarm to their new hives at the City's apiary, located at the public works corporation yard.

The apiary is composed of three to five active hives maintained by City staff. The apiary is a protected environment where bees continue to provide community benefits without the hazard of poorly located hives in public space. Along with the apiary, there are also natural hives located in trees at City parks. All of these hives have been identified and are located high enough off the ground to avoid interaction with park users. Special care is taken when performing tree maintenance near these hives to ensure the bees are not disturbed or displaced.

To raise awareness about this new program and educate residents about the importance of pollinators, Mayor Peter Ohtaki declared August 17, 2013 the Day of the Honey Bee. In honor of the day, a presentation was given by City staff and a member of the San Mateo



The City of Menlo Park, California established an observational hive for community events. Photo by Brian Henry

Beekeeper's Guild about the importance of bees and potential new ordinances that could further protect pollinators. Honey produced by the City bees was also distributed for tasting! In addition, the City established an observational hive to use as an educational tool for residents and children. The hive is equipped with glass on both sides so the queen and all the activities of the hive can be safely observed. The observational hive is easy to transport and a popular exhibit during Public Works Week and other community events.

As a result of increased awareness about honeybees in the City, in the winter of 2014 public works staff noticed bees flying at night, hovering like moths around a City building light. The bees were coming from an established hive in a nearby oak tree and ending up dead and disoriented each morning below the light. A sample of dead bees was collected and observed. After about a week, parasitic fly larvae commonly known as "zombie flies" emerged from the dead bees. The female zombie flies lay eggs on the honeybee and as the larvae develop, they attack the bee's brain, causing them to become disoriented. The infected "ZomBees" are known to fly at

night and exhibit other strange behaviors. It is believed that zombie flies are partially responsible for the disappearance of honeybees along the West Coast. Staff continues to monitor and collect samples for "ZomBee Watch," a citizen-science project sponsored by the San Francisco State University Department of Biology.

Our City's beekeeping program was awarded the Tree City USA Growth Award by the Arbor Day Foundation in 2014. Due to the symbiotic relationship between trees and bees, municipal arborists are often the first to respond when a swarm moves through a community. In Menlo Park, City Arborist Christian Bonner (ISA-certified Municipal Specialist and Board Certified Master Arborist) is alerted by residents and notifies the beekeepers on staff when bees require relocation. When the City's apiary is full, hives are placed with local backyard beekeepers. The positive relationships among City staff, residents, and local beekeepers are the foundation of Menlo Park's successful beekeeping program.

—Brian Henry, Superintendent of Public Works, Menlo Park, California



Feral hive on sabal palm (*Sabal palmetto*) tree • Photo by Jeff Shimonski

At Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens in Naples, Florida, we have had many feral bee hives appear in our large trees and snags that are left in natural areas for local wildlife. This requires a balance—we want to provide habitat for local nesting birds but be mindful of the possibility of feral bees making a home as well. If a feral hive is found in a location away from animal areas or public areas, we will leave it be and monitor for reduced activity. However, if the feral hive is in close proximity to a playground, main visitor pathway, or animal/staff area and the bees appear to be negatively impacting the animals or public, we will call a licensed and state registered vendor to have the feral hive removed.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services recommends that feral honey bees found nesting in proximity to areas where people and domestic animals frequent be removed or eradicated by a licensed, insured, and trained PCO (Pest Control Operator) or safely removed by a beekeeper registered by the state of Florida.

One major issue for the Naples Zoo is that the hives are usually in a location that cannot be easily accessed by a local beekeeper. In one instance, we enlisted the help of our tree care company for assistance; they donated the use of their lift to get to the hive for removal. In another case, we had a feral hive in a swamp preserve area adjacent to our giraffe exhibit. These bees were aggressive toward the giraffe and staff working around that

area. Our tree care company assisted by sending a tree climber who suited up and worked alongside our vendor to remove the hive in a dead snag ... in the swamp!

Many other AZA-accredited zoos have working relationships with the local beekeeping organizations and will contact them for removal and relocation of swarms and hives that are found on property.

—Danielle L. Green, Director of Gardens & Grounds, Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, Naples Florida

Here in Washington DC, the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) is housed out of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT). In early 2012 our head of UFA, John Thomas, approached our then-GIS Coordinator Jim Amerault, a seasoned beekeeper, about the possibility of keeping bees in the District as well as relocating honeybee swarms that were found in City trees. Jim trained seven arborists including myself to tend honeybee hives. The first year we bought bees in, but in subsequent years we've been able to stock our hives with swarm captures, which we do on average three to four times a year.

We also connected with local beekeeping expert Toni Burnham, who became our ongoing mentor. Toni will spot swarms in the City and call us. We'll meet her there with a bucket truck and we have a simple process for splitting the swarms. An arborist puts on the beekeeper suit, goes up in the truck, and prunes out the branch with the hive (usually 25 to 30 feet/7.6 to 9.1 m up), then puts the hive into a paper box. Back on land, we gently brush or shake the bees into an empty hive body standing by that is either one of ours or that of a local beekeeper that is going to take them home. There's a very robust and growing beekeeper community in the District right now, so we have no trouble finding good homes for the bees.

It's amazing how docile the bees in the swarm can be. Swarming is a natural means of increasing the bee population; it's a splitting of the hive population. In the spring or summer, when the hive has 40 to 50 thousand bees and it decides it's time to split, roughly half the bees and the queen gorge on honey before they fly a short distance to a temporary location. That is often a branch or stop sign. A few hundred bees—scouts—go out and find the permanent home, then the swarm follows. The gorging prior to swarming leaves the bees rather weighted down, which is why they are not aggressive at this time.

My number one piece of advice for fellow city foresters is to get to know your local experienced beekeepers. Our mentor Toni likes to say, "If you ask five beekeepers how to do something, you'll get seven answers." So

there is more than one right way to do things, and it's good to talk with a variety of people.

Second, it's important to keep in mind your local context and think ahead about where the hives are going to best sited so that you don't have to disrupt them. Some people are uneasy about bees so you have to educate or stay away from those people when you site your hives. We've got four sites; two of them are on DDOT property, one is on property managed by DC Parks and Recreation, and one is on the green roof of a local youth and environmental nonprofit. They are protected by simple fencing of fence panels and cinderblocks.

We have four hives now but would like to go up to about nine. For me the experience of beekeeping in the District has taught me a lot and when I have a house with sufficient land I'm going to keep bees of my own, and I know the other arborists are thinking similarly. It has helped attune us to the natural world and especially to plant phenology.

For the City being the size that it is, DC has a lot of little forest parcels. You hear about problems with bees in the agricultural areas but in places with good stands of trees like in the District, for the most part, I'm happy to say, the pollinators are doing pretty well. Our contribution might perhaps be helping along a hyper-localized strain of honeybees.

—William Heist, Urban Forester, District Department of Transportation, Urban Forestry Administration, Washington DC

Capturing honeybee hives can be an expensive adventure: suit, hive boxes, frames, smokers, brushes, cages, buckets, screen, bungee cord, and hours checking to make sure they are healthy and happy. I consider myself very lucky to harvest honey, and that is time-consuming as well.

There is a lot to know to keep bees successfully. Fortunately, there is lots of help in most states. Florida is awesome, from the state level to the cranky old guy, Oscar, who is teaching me and loves his bees.

Very rarely do I find that a hive wants to be moved when they're not swarming; they defend the hive with their lives. I remove the comb a piece at a time and put it in frames, holding the comb in place with rubber bands. I'm careful not to cut into the brood comb, and I'm always looking for the queen, with queen catcher at hand (a small plastic cage that will allow the bees in but not allow the queen out.) If you catch her the job is much easier, as all the workers and drones will follow the queen's scent right into the new home.

It takes a special person to be a beekeeper. It takes dedication and the ability to be relaxed and calm if stung. I have captured several hives, but only one has



A beekeeper in Columbia, Missouri lifts a honeybee frame from a hive. • Photo by Brett O'Brien

stayed, and I've had that one for a year, so now I can now call myself a beekeeper. Now I am comfortable capturing bee hives that would otherwise be sprayed with chemicals and killed. They may not always stay with me but rather escape to another beautiful place of their choosing. I may not be the best at beekeeping, but I hope there are more bees alive today than yesterday because of the things I do.

—Bob Brennan, Consultant and Arborist, Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden, Coral Gables, Florida



Bee City USA

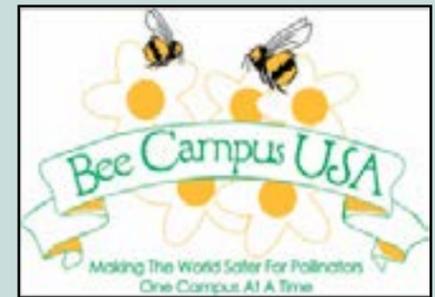
(beecityusa.org)

Bee City USA encourages city leaders to celebrate and raise awareness of the contribution bees and other pollinators make to our world. Launched in 2012, the Bee City USA program endorses a set of standards, defined in a resolution, for creating sustainable habitats for pollinators, which are vital to feeding the planet. Cities, towns, and communities across America are invited to adopt these standards and become a Bee City USA affiliate.

In 2006 when honeybee colonies started disappearing, later dubbed "Colony Collapse Disorder," beekeepers and non-beekeepers alike became very concerned. After all, one in every three bites of food we eat is courtesy of

insect pollination. Equally important, 85% of flowering plants and trees rely on pollinators for the survival of their species. While less is known about native bees and other pollinators, we do know that entire species are disappearing at alarming rates as they battle most of the same enemies as honeybees—loss of habitat essential for food and shelter, inappropriate pesticide use, diseases, and parasites.

The inaugural Bee City USA was Asheville, North Carolina. (Hoping that Asheville would launch a movement across the nation, members of the Buncombe County Chapter of the NC State Beekeepers Association established Bee City USA.) Communities that followed were Carrboro and Matthews, North Carolina; Talent and Ashland, Oregon; and Clarkson, Kentucky.



On April 8, 2015, Southern Oregon University (SOU) and Bee City USA launched the national Bee Campus USA program, designed to marshal the strengths of college campuses for the benefit of pollinators. The University collaborated with Bee City USA on developing the guidelines for certification after being inspired by two of the early adopters of Bee City USA—SOU's hometown of Ashland, and neighboring Talent, Oregon.

All honeybees found in the United States

belong to the genus *Apis* and are considered imports to the New World. Both the European honeybee (EHB) and the African honeybee (AHB) are subspecies of the western honeybee, *Apis mellifera*. The EHB was first introduced to the Americas by European colonists and has been popular for centuries because of its high levels of honey production and importance as a pollinator, as well as for its docile behavior and reduced tendency to swarm or split colonies.

While the EHB was found to be a prolific honey producer in temperate North America, its performance was less noteworthy in the tropical and subtropical climates of Central and South America. As a result, the AHB was brought to Brazil in the 1950s as part of breeding efforts designed to increase honey production. During this time, several queen AHBs were accidentally released, thrived in the local environment, and began a northern and southern migration.

Although slightly smaller (approximately 10%) in size, the AHB is not visually distinguishable from the EHB

without laboratory testing. Behavioral clues, however, provide good indicators of the subspecies in question. The EHB, for example, tends to swarm one to two times annually. The swarms are larger and thus need a larger cavity, like those found in trees, to build a nest. The AHB, on the other hand, can swarm every six weeks and may swarm ten or more times a year. Because the AHB swarms are smaller in size, they can successfully nest in smaller cavities and have been found in water meter boxes, metal utility poles, old tires, and below-ground cavities. The smaller AHB nests often go undetected until disturbed.

While all honeybees defend their nests, the AHB is considerably more aggressive than the EHB in doing so. Not only is the AHB colony more easily disturbed than the EHB, once disturbed, the AHB will respond by sending hundreds more guard bees to sting and will pursue for a greater distance and sting more than the EHB. After a disturbance, the EHB colony will usually become calm after one to two hours, while the AHB requires a longer time to settle down.

As the AHB has spread throughout South and Central America and into the southwest United States and Florida, it has hybridized with the EHB in regions where both subspecies are present. This hybridized bee is commonly known as the Africanized honey bee.

Twenty-five years ago, the AHB, continuing on its northward journey, crossed from Mexico into the United States and was found in Texas near the small border town of Hidalgo. Since then, according to Dr. Mike Merchant, Professor and Extension Urban Entomologist with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, it has spread across the state and hybridized with our wild (feral or escaped) EHB population, making it best to proceed with caution and assume that any wild bee colony seen in Texas parks or backyards is Africanized.

As such, the way we urban foresters handle bees in Fort Worth, Texas, largely depends on these two factors: What conflict are they presenting, and who is the land manager responsible? For example, as part of the parks and community services department, the forestry section which I am a part of has jurisdiction over all trees on City property, but is only funded for tree risk abatement. When there is a bee swarm on the outside of a tree, we refer the concerned resident or City department to a beekeeper.

We currently do not have bee suits for our pruning crews, so when bees are inside broken limbs to be removed, the pruning crew has blocked off any cavity entrances into the limb that would allow the bees to escape. In the time it takes the bees to find another exit, the crew has typically completed the broken limb removal and moved on to another job site. As much

as possible, we will schedule the removal of low limbs, known to have bees, for winter months or cooler mornings when the bees tend to be less active. For the most part, we have not found bees to be a big concern in day-to-day pruning work. Interestingly, another stinging insect that can cause allergic reactions in people, the fire ant, is frequently found by our pruning crews in both cedar elm and American elm trees.

Tree removals are another story, since bees are more commonly found in trunk and branch cavities of dead and declining trees. Our number of tree removals with bees inside has increased proportionately the last three years as the number of tree removals has increased due to drought, but remains a small percentage of all removals. The forestry section contracts out our tree removals. Because our contractor is expected to handle any tree removal that has bees, several years ago we amended our pruning and removal bid specs to include this provision, "The Contractor shall be responsible for the removal of bees and/or any other insects, animals or wildlife that may be present and interfering with the required scope of work without additional compensation."

Whenever we are aware that bees are present, we will note it on the work order for the contractor. Our contractor has worked with a local beekeeper to have bees removed before taking down a tree and also has full bee protection suits for their crews. An arborist wearing a bee suit while operating a chain saw looks like something resembling a scene in a sci-fi movie and should be enough to catch anyone's attention, but we have recently had one incident of a pedestrian walking into a clearly delineated work zone, only to take off running the opposite direction when the bees began to swarm around him!

While the forestry section has jurisdiction over all City-owned trees, we are not the land managers of Fort Worth's more than 200 parks and public land spaces citywide. This responsibility lies with the five regional supervisors who manage the parks in their respective area. Because they have a responsibility for both park maintenance and public safety, they do work with a beekeeper to remove bee swarms that are in close proximity to higher traffic areas such as playgrounds, walking trails, and picnic tables. Like us, they will typically remove low limbs over park trails and other areas in winter months when bees are less active. On occasion, however, they have had to call a beekeeper to remove a hive in order for pruning work to continue, and will use pesticides on wasps on an as-needed basis.

—Melanie Migura, Forester, City of Fort Worth, Texas

Last summer was my first year as beekeeper, and I was keen to increase my stock of bees, so I placed my name on a list kept by the local beekeeper's association to answer swarm calls. Sure enough, in mid-June a woman phoned in that a swarm of honeybees had been clustered in her cottonwood tree for three days. I called her for details, and it sounded like this was indeed honeybees and not wasps, and that they were swarmed on a branch, and not defending a nest.

I arrived at her house, and together we examined the soccer-ball-sized swarm 8 to 10 meters (26 to 33 feet) high in her tree, out on a lateral branch far from the trunk. I had a 24-foot (7-m) extension ladder and a 12-foot (3.6-m) pole with an open cardboard box hanging from the tip to collect the swarm if I could reach it. I climbed to the top of the ladder, up the trunk a little, and out on a sturdy lower branch, having clipped myself on a tether to the main trunk first. I was able to reach out to get the collection box underneath the swarm with the hook on the end of the pole looped over the branch on which they were clustered. A sharp tug on the pole dislodged the clump of bees, and they landed with an audible thump and cloud of airborne bees in the box.

I gradually lowered the box, allowing the bees in flight

to rejoin their queen as I climbed down the ladder to the ground. After another twenty minutes on the ground, only 20 to 30 bees were left circling the box, and the rest were all happily clustered inside. I closed up the opening to the box, leaving it in the shade, with an opening for stragglers and returning scouts.

I took the box home later that evening, and placed them in a new and inviting home the next morning. They happily built lots of new comb over the following weeks, and by September had built a healthy colony that showed every sign of coming through last winter strong and healthy.

The homeowner was an eager observer of the whole process and was very happy to see the bees safe in a suitable home. The bees were calm and peaceful throughout, and I did the whole collection in shorts and a T-shirt, without any stings. Swarming bees have no home or honey to defend, and are at their most docile and tractable if you move slowly and deliberately. Swarm collections can look dramatic, but are one of the safest times for handling bees, and even newbies like me can do a good job of collecting bees looking for a good home.

—Trevor Janz, Beekeeper, Kootenay, British Columbia



A honeybee swarm as seen on mainehoneybees.com.